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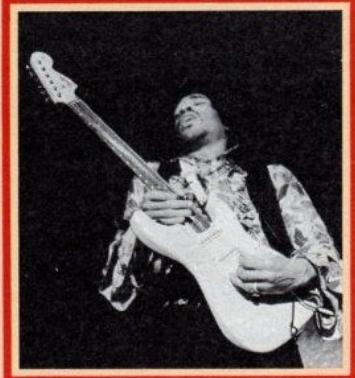
The
Voodoo
Lives On

Jimi
Hendrix
Special



Charlie Christian, Ian Hunter, Lead Guitarists, Rock Movies

JIMI HENDRIX



THE VOODOO LIVES ON

A decade has passed since Jimi Hendrix departed this plane. He was a prophet who had known some honor, almost all of it exactly the wrong kind, a prolific and profligate creator who left almost everyone who heard or saw him with the distinct impression that the heartcenter of his work remained tantalizingly out of reach. So even today, as scraps

of his music never intended for public consumption are steadily dredged up, each one is greeted with nervous anticipation, as if the right six hundred feet of tape might open up and clarify the dimensions and secrets of his ambition, recasting his music in comprehensible fashion, reducing it to something intellectually explicable. Fat chance.

By Dave Marsh

Almost everyone has their own idea of what Hendrix was about, a situation symptomized by the fact that his brief four years at the top spawned at least that many genres, from the basest heavy metal to Patti Smith's poetical alchemy, from the ethereal fusion of Mahavishnu Orchestra and Weather Report to the gutter funk of George Clinton's various ensembles. True enough, much of this music might have come to pass even without Hendrix (and for the latter two examples, Sly Stone and Miles Davis are equally important parents). But surely, since

Jimi was around, all of it has been in some way transformed by his brief passage through these precincts.

At first I was incensed by his death (like many who dearly loved his life, his music, and his style) to the point that I clearly bore a visible anger. It took me two full years and a trip to England to get over that hardboiled almost private-eye-like intensity. Once it entered my mind that the most important thing about the man was



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his life, I was home free ... I too began enjoying Jimi Hendrix's life instead of hating his death.

— David Henderson, *Jimi Hendrix: Voodoo Child of the Aquarian Age*

David Henderson's beautiful and unjustly ignored Hendrix biography is in its essence a long plea to take its subject seriously, and a howl of outrage against those who have trivialized him. ("Rock and Roll Nigger," indeed.) No one who wants to assemble a coherent version of Jimi's story can afford to be without this book — it is not only the best version, it is the only complete one, tracing the life of James Marshall Hendrix back through ring shouts, gospel choruses and his father's jazz dancing (he once tapped with Louis Armstrong).

The story begins in Seattle, Washington on November 27, 1942. The early years aren't much more than what you'd expect: broken home, middle-level poverty, mixed-up confusion until he found the guitar. Jimi was always shy, always sensual. So he quickly learned two passions: guitars and women. In its bare outline, this could be an updated version of three-quarters of the music legends of our time, from Robert Johnson to Elvis Presley. The typical high school bands, playing the standard high school songs of that time: Jimi's favorites were "Cathy's Clown," "Sleep Walk," "Summertime Blues," "The Peter Gunn Theme." Smoldering stuff, catalytic heat under a wet blanket.

In his senior year, Jimi dropped out, hung around, then joined the Army, to become a "Screaming Eagle," the mighty 101st Airborne, heirs to the cavalry, the remorseless paratrooping shock troops of Vietnam. During this time he made quite a few parachute jumps. He apparently loved the feeling of freefall and the shaking roaring din of the huge aircraft in flight, the whooshing scream of the wind as the jump door opened; the combination of fear and excitement as the brilliant skylight flooded over him ... sounds and feelings he would remember. But at the Mississippi Delta camp, Fort Campbell, near the storied blues plantation town, Clarksdale, Jimi was widely disliked by his barracksmates: he slept with his guitar, and kept them up all night twanging strangely on its subdued unamplified strings. So he got out — Section Eight, a mental discharge, it seems — along with his lone buddy, a bass player named Billy Cox. They went to Nashville, cut a couple demos with Steve Cropper (which were ignored), and starved. Jimi went back home, up to Vancouver, where he hitched up with Tommy Chong in Bobby Taylor and the Vancouvers. Little Richard spotted him there, and took him out on the chit'lín' circuit. (One of these leave takings — Jimi never said which, but it was probably the first, was prompted by a spurned woman, who tried to work a voodoo "root," or spell, against him. It landed him in the hospital, he claimed. It was not the first time women and treachery would walk hand in hand in his life.)

So began Jimi's itinerant life as a hired hand — with Little Richard, whom he drove half crazy with his flamboyance, which already exceeded the original; with Chuck Jackson, the Supremes, even Gorgeous George, the wrestler; happily with the Isley Brothers (where he played lead on a version of "Staggerlee" that has the original great machine gun guitar solo) and King Curtis, Joey Dee and the Starliters, and catastrophically, Curtis Knight. Onstage he made his name as a showman, a wildman whose very tuning up was threatening to insecure musicians, but one capable of playing anything. Off the road, though quiet and shy, he roamed Manhattan, from Harlem, where he got a weird rep for his drag queen impersonations and love of Bob Dylan records, down to the Village, where he was — initially — just another freak.

It's probably typical of the era that only twice did anyone see anything in Hendrix beyond a peculiarly extravagant sideman: Once when he met up with Cropper, and again in 1964, when Les Paul saw him auditioning in Jersey bar. Jimi didn't get the gig, and was long gone, of course, by the time Les came back to track him down. But by the middle of 1966, he was ready to try fronting his own band, and Jimmy James and the Blue Flames began working at the dumpiest dive on Bleecker

Street, the Cafe Wha? Not too long afterward, John Hammond Jr. spotted him, and Hendrix was playing in a straight blues setting with Hammond across the street at Cafe Au Go Go when the Stones and Animals, along with Mike Bloomfield, saw him that summer. And it was Animal bassist Chas Chandler, apparently acting on the urging of Keith Richards' girlfriend of that period, Linda Keith, who offered to take Jimi back to England, manage him and produce his records, along with Chandler's partner, an ex-Commando, Michael Jeffery.

What followed was the public legend: the almost immediate conquest of England, Monterey, Woodstock, Isle of Wight, the drugs and the women, the recordings and the lawsuits. Jimi was a hero, but what kind? Some said he was a jazz giant trapped by commercial idioms into pop nonsense, some found in him the ultimate rock and roll star, to some he was a technical wizard, an electronic savant, or a psychedelic shaman (or even, a sham), pure git-down guitar showman,

Hendrix saw himself as a symbolic figure who contained in his bloodstream elements of all races. The goal of his performances was both racial and musical unity. His deepest desire was to cut across all boundaries. The goal was unity in the metaphysical sense.

animalistic purveyor of cheap sensation and cretin violence, apostle of peace and love and good vibes, mystic overlord. Or simple screwed-up voodoo child.

Naturally, before the end, there were relevant texts to support any and all such contentions: Hendrix played music almost every night of his adult life, with the most unlikely collaborators, and almost every one of those nights seems to have been attended for at least a few minutes by some manner of recording device.

When he died, on September 17, 1970, the real war for his life began. Initially, they said he died of a drug overdose, but that probably wasn't true. He had been high the night before, he'd taken a sleeping tablet, but he would have lived if the ambulance attendants had taken proper care with him. Truth is, he choked to death on his own vomit. But for whatever reasons, there were those who needed to believe that he OD'd, to prove that playing rock and roll destroys genius, or that the inherent evils of the commercial record business had devoured him, or just to justify their own excesses. So to this day there are those who'll tell you Jimi Hendrix was a junkie, and that's what killed him. It's a lie.

He was, however, as deeply troubled as a sensitive man who is seen by a large part of the world as a freak must inevitably be, and as angry as an intelligent man who had begun to perceive how brutally he was being misguided had a right to be. It's interesting, reading the many lengthy interviews Jimi gave, to see how little of himself he was asked to reveal. No one seemed much interested in his ideas — which he spewed out anyway, irrepressibly, responding to the simplest question with a cosmic over-view, like the time a third grade teacher asked him how he was doing, and he replied "Just like the people on Mars are doing." Rolling Stone took a voyeur's delight in asking him whether he was allied with the Black Panthers, presuming that the Panthers were the only political group on the black left at the time worth inquiring about, and that Jimi, with his Cherokee cheekbones and white audience, couldn't be really black in his attitudes and commitments. (Racism rolls out of these interviews, like the time the English girl asks him — no, tells him — that he's "an animal." Must have been real uplifting.)

No one asked about his business, not that Hendrix wasn't so befuddled on a lot of those points that his answers would have been coherent. To record as a sideman with Curtis Knight, he'd been forced to sign a \$1 contract with an unbelievably unscrupulous character named Ed Chalpin, who later won two percent of his record royalties and the right to the Band of



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"The deeper you get into it, the more sacrifices you have to make. I dedicate my whole life to this art . . . you have to forget what people say about you sometimes . . . when you're supposed to die and when you're supposed to be living. You have to go on and be crazy. Craziness is like heaven. Once you reach that point where you don't care about what everybody is sayin', you're goin' towards heaven . . . your own heaven."

Jimi Hendrix from Superstars

Gypsies live album in an out-of-court settlement because Hendrix's management controlled lawyers weren't willing to mount a substantial fight. (Chalpin's two percent came out of Jimi's royalty, not theirs — they got seven percent, he split three with Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding, plus paid Jeffery and Chandler 30 percent of live money, as well as 30 percent of his record money.) Jimi's management contract was almost through; he'd made it clear to Jeffery (Chandler having split) that he wasn't about to resign. Some people say that's why he died.

Hendrix left behind an enormous number of studio and live recordings. Some were intended for future albums, some were

concerts (although beyond the *Band of Gypsies* album, there's no indication that he had planned to issue any live material), many were only jams.

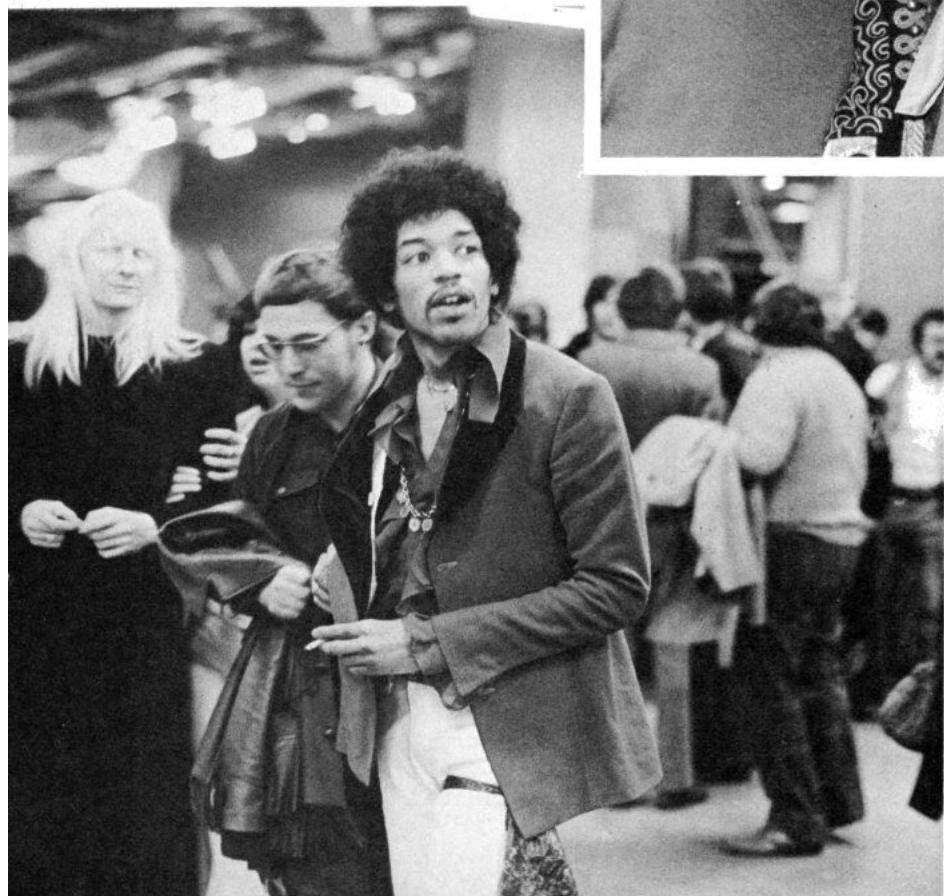
Jimi jammed with sheer indiscrimination, choosing partners willy-nilly from whomever had the stamina and courage to share the bandstand. He played with John McLaughlin and Larry Young, it's true, and thus had his share of influence on spiritual fusion, but he also dabbled with such heavy metal tyros of tastelessness as Ted Nugent and Jim McCarty, and thus had his share of influence on sheer carnal vulgarity in its modern aspect. Which is one thing that makes hash of producer Alan Douglas's recent attempts, as curator of the Hen-



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Jimi with good friend Buddy Miles,
drummer on the *Band of Gypsies* tour.

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FRED McDARRAH

Hendrix loved to jam and would play long hours with anyone who could stand up there with him. Backstage with blues jam partner Johnny Winter (left). Above, with drummer Mitch Mitchell (left) and bassist Noel Redding in the early Experience days.

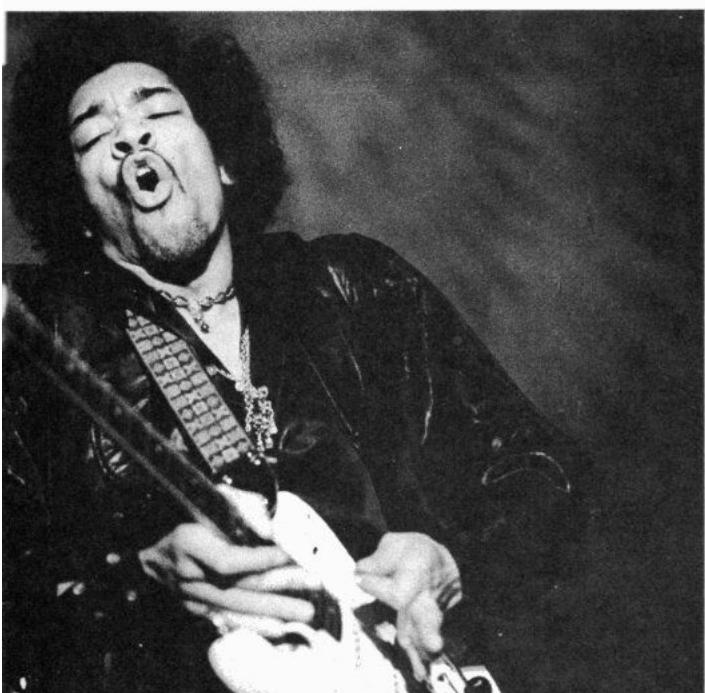


BARON WOLMAN

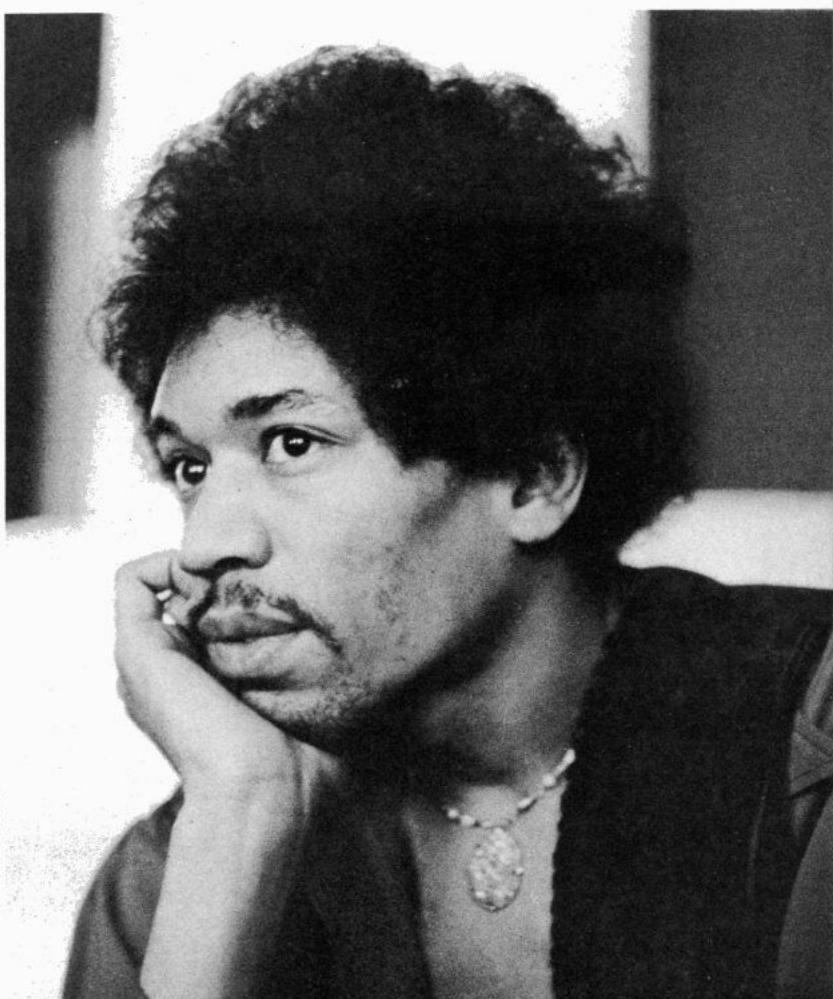


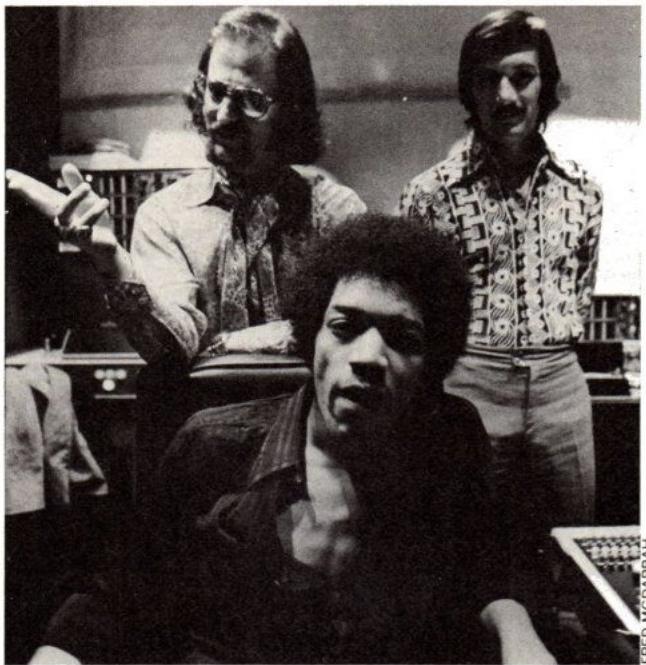
Jimi with Rolling Stone Brian Jones at the Monterey Pop Festival. Jones, the Stones' founder, was Jimi's closest friend in England. He died in 1969.

All Jimi wanted to do was play music and keep growing, yet he was constantly being hounded by ridiculous contracts from the past and an insensitive management who only wanted him touring and earning. Right, at one of his last interviews, withdrawn and embittered by the demands of those around him.



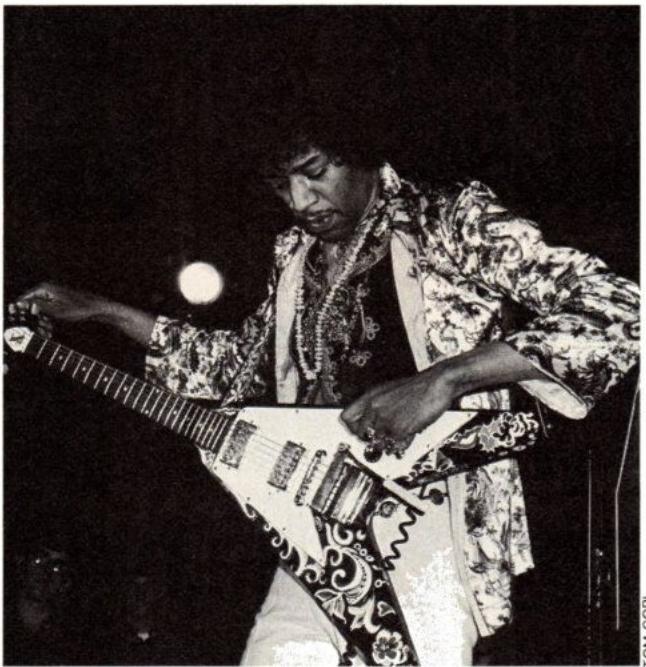
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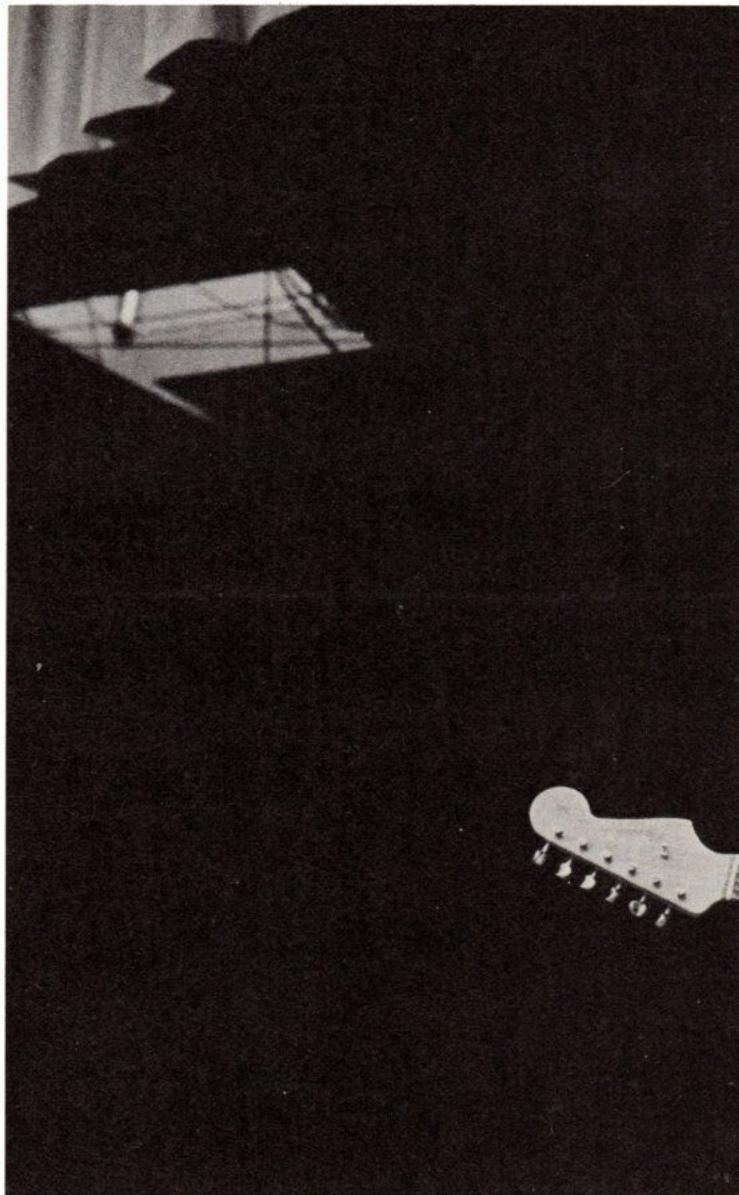
Jimi at Electric Ladyland, the studio he built in N.Y., here with business mgr. Jim Marron (r.) and Eddie Kramer (l.) the innovative engineer who helped create many of the trademark Hendrix sounds on record.



TOM COPPI

Hendrix Discography

Of the many Hendrix albums out, only five came out while he was alive, and only one, *Electric Ladyland*, was produced just as he wanted it. In order of release, *Are You Experienced?*, *Axis: Bold As Love*, *Electric Ladyland*, *Smash Hits* and *Band of Gypsys*. After his death came *Cry of Love*, *Rainbow Bridge*, *Loose Ends*, *Hendrix in the West*, *War Heroes*, *Sound Track from the Film Jimi Hendrix*, *Crash Landings*, *Midnight Lightning*, *Essential Jimi Hendrix Vols. I and II*, and *Nine to the Universe*. Except for *Cry of Love* and portions of *Rainbow Bridge*, which contained nearly finished studio cuts, the rest are made up of partially realized studio pieces, some with overdubbed rhythm sections, jams, and live performances. The early Hendrix are all essential, the posthumous are interesting in parts, but frustrating because of knowing how much farther Jimi would have taken them had he lived.

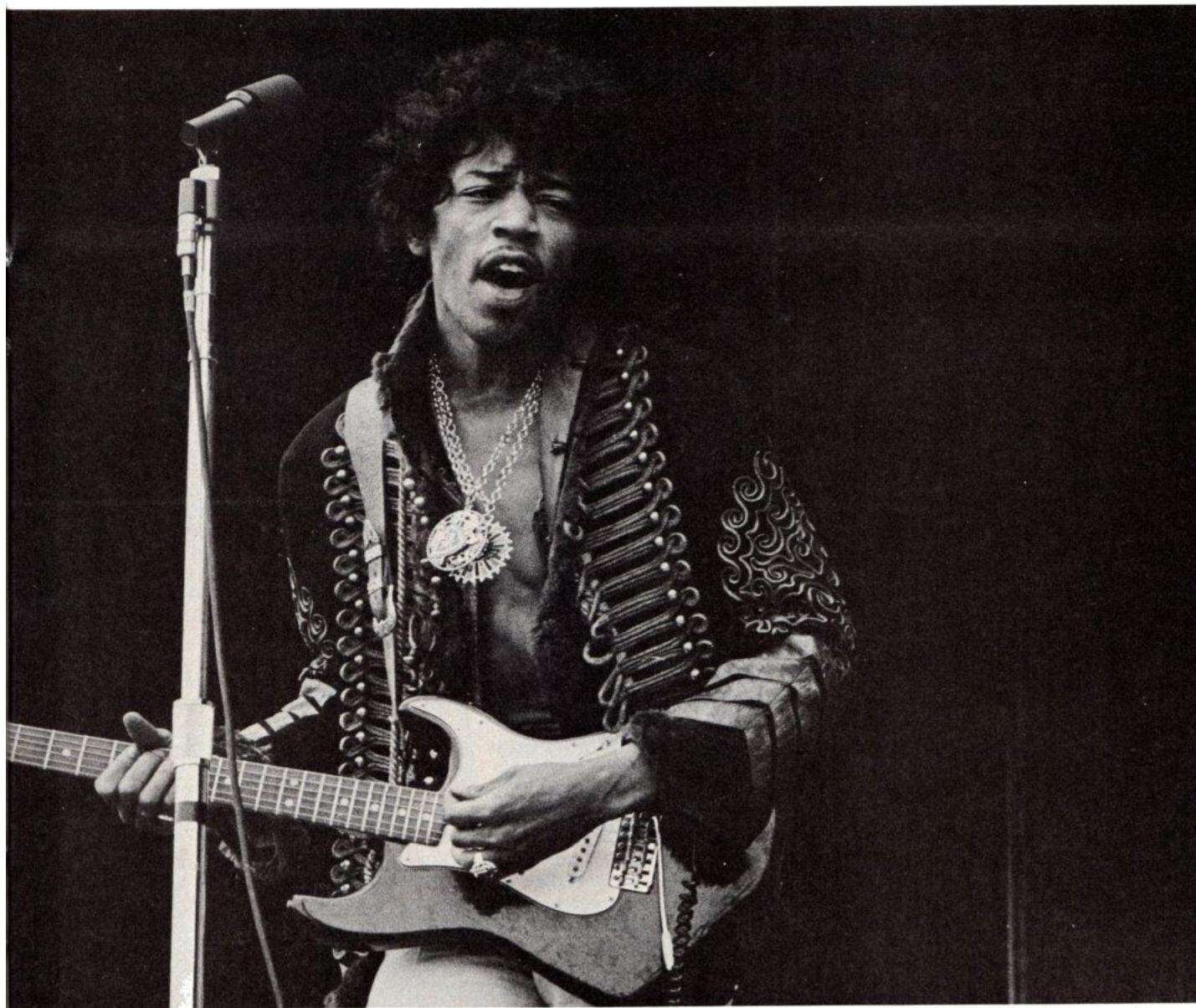


Jimi's first appearance with the Experience in the States blew

meanderings, but McLaughlin earned a career — and I mean earned one, since in some ways he proved Jimi's most adept student. Yet if the McLaughlin tapes have never been released by now, chances are they never will be, since they were the "Discovery" of which Douglas most often boasted when he appointed himself chief poobah of the Jimi archives back in '74.

But it's easy to believe that the rumored reason they haven't been issued is the truth: That McLaughlin hates them, as well he might, for they reveal that everything interesting about his style that wasn't learned from Miles Davis was picked up at Jimi's heel — not that there's anything shameful about taking your cues from that pair, unless some fool has been going around implying that you are their equal. (Proves McLaughlin isn't a fool, I guess.)

Douglas might be. He claims that he was Jimi's next producer, but Hendrix failed to mention it, at least in public. (He did use Douglas as a kind of talent scout, who arranged meetings with McLaughlin, Young and Tony Williams — the latter a catastrophe, apparently — for him.) But selfpromotional zeal is hardly Alan Douglas's worst sin against the Hendrix legacy. *Crash Landing* and *Midnight Lightning*, the first two Douglas-produced Hendrix albums, are abominations unto the Lord, featuring studio tracks from which the original rhythm sections were erased in favor of wooden studio pros whose sympathy with Jimi's spirit ranges from nil to negative. (The result is



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away the entire crowd at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967. The pandemonium lasted a full 20 minutes; Hendrix had arrived.

music with less vitality than Jimi's session work with the Isley Brothers, where he was supposed to remain fairly anonymous.) Douglas, of course, claims that the touch-up job was revelatory of where Hendrix's music was really headed, which would probably be a surprise to many of the musicians on, say *Nine to the Universe*, who are strained to the utmost to keep up with his ideas even in such chance encounters.

Well, we've all raked Norman Petty over the black coals of our heart's hostility for years, and it would hardly be worth visiting the same wrath on Douglas if not for circumstances, to wit: He remains in control of Warner Bros. Hendrix releasing plans, and will undoubtedly pull the same tricks again, if we let him, and (worse) Douglas's inferior releases are meant to replace the decent job that Eddie Kramer, Jeffery and some others did on the early Hendrix archival issues.

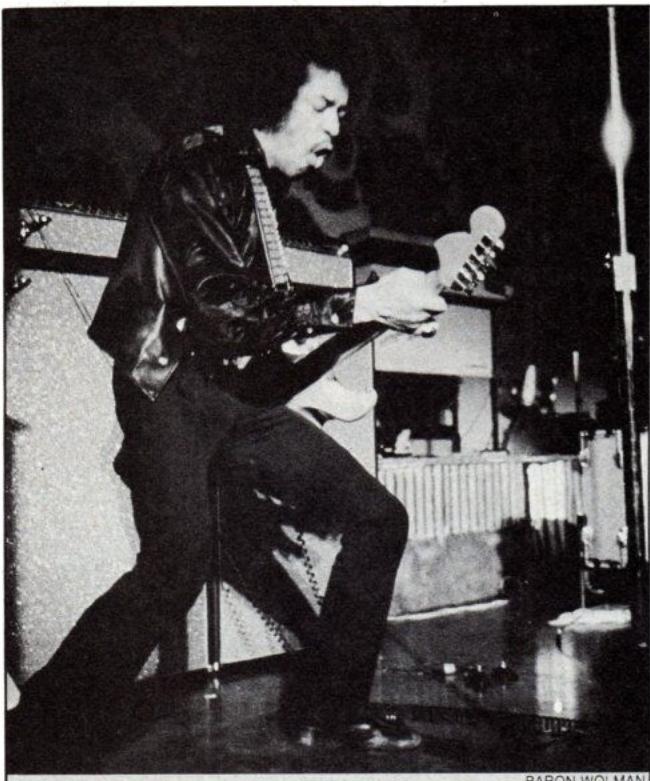
Of course, the path for Douglas's usurpation of the custody of the tape was laid by the lukewarm reception given to such early posthumous LPs as *War Heroes*, *Hendrix in the West*, *Cry of Love*, and *Rainbow Bridge*. The latter, which contain uncompleted but suggestive versions of the projected material for the next Hendrix album, *First Ray of the New Rising Sun* probably give the best indication of where the living Jimi Hendrix actually was headed.

Those albums opened the door for Douglas's attempt to remodel Hendrix's image. Lay that off to their lack of coherence as albums — their titles are misleading and their contents as

They said he died of a drug overdose but that's a lie. He was, however, as deeply troubled as a sensitive man who is perceived as a freak must be, and as angry as an intelligent man who sees how brutally he has been misguided has a right to be.

erratic as the man himself — but giving credit where it is due, don't deny that, say, the revved-up Chuck Berry of *Hendrix in the West*'s "Johnny B. Goode" is a hell of a lot more important (and interesting) than the doodlings of the jam tapes. In my mind what Douglas plans is the equivalent of melting Picasso's sculptures (because they distort his achievements as a painter) and enshrining his check stubs (because at least they're two-dimensional).

Which is a drag because there is a very interesting body of Hendrix music which remains unreleased in the U.S. Or maybe anywhere, though tracking down every international Hendrix release is a job for fanatics. But just to suggest the highlights: "Spanish Castle Magic," which might be the greatest live Hendrix these ears have ever witnessed, is left off the British *Isle of Wight* album (you can hear the first notes of it following "God Save the Queen" on *In the West*); "Hoochie Coochie Man," from the British *Loose Ends...* anthology; a



BARON WOLMAN

HENDRIX'S EQUIPMENT

The fact is that half the guitar effects-boxes on the market today were rigged up to make some sound that Jimi Hendrix produced without them, and synthesists still occasionally labor in vain to make those uncanny Hendrix sounds. His intuitive mastery not only of the guitar but of the properties of electricity and sound have never really been equalled, nor put so completely at the command of pure creative impulse. Hendrix's favorite guitar was, of course, the Fender Stratocaster, strung upside-down, and he travelled with a brace of them (twelve or more). They never lasted long. He modified them and trashed them all in the same process. He was also known to use Gibson Flying V's, various Guild, Martin and Black Widow acoustics, Les Pauls, Hagstrom basses and the occasional Rickenbacker. Almost as well known as the white Strats were his stack of Marshall amps and what he did to them, but he started out with a Fender Twin Reverb then went to Marshalls, worked with customized Sunn amps for awhile before discarding them for the Marshalls again (100 and sometimes 200 watters, modified, using six or more cabinets and the PA). For foot pedals, a Dallas-Arbiter Fuzz Face and a Cry Baby were the core, along with the Univox Univibe, and he also used a battery of primitive phasers, octave dividers and phasers (set for stun, usually), and in the studio worked as freely with the resources of tape and board as he did with his onstage gear, engineer Eddie Kramer and himself inventing much of it as they went along. The lighter fluid was always Ronson.

There's still some dispute as to what modifications he made when. With the Stratocasters, he could usually be counted upon to bend the tremolo bar to his own uses, make his own adjustments at the pickup and bridge, and to rip the back panel off, the better to get at the circuitry. It is unlikely that someone as faithful to the creative forces as Jimi Hendrix was 100% consistent or repeated himself often. What is probably most amazing was the range of materials and effects he could bring under his command without ever being distracted by them: they were always something to be mastered and used by the music that was coming through to him. Which is what life is like when you kiss the sky...

great version of "Please Crawl Out Your Window," from the British TV show, *Top Gear*, and the entire contents of his concerts at the Los Angeles Forum (especially "Room Full of Mirrors") and the show at Maui's Crater of the Sun. There is much more — Hendrix biographer David Henderson notes that he helped create a five hour documentary of Jimi's music a couple of years ago — and with the exception of the usual meretricious Springboard ripoffs, all of it is worth hearing at least once.

Still, these are incomplete as recordings, merely documentation of what Hendrix's mighty whims were like. Nothing is finished, not even the concert tapes (which at least have the advantage of being intended for a reasonably wide audience). One of the things that makes Douglas's bowdlerizations so frustrating is that Jimi was becoming such a studio perfectionist toward the end. He clearly had an idea of making records that went beyond what he could do live (interestingly, because most of his disciples have only been able to duplicate the outlines of what he could do live in the studio). If Hendrix was moving beyond rock and roll guitar, chances are good that his new instrument was going to be the recording studio itself (which explains Electric Ladyland, among other things). Remember, too, that Jimi was among the first rock musicians to involve himself in every step of the recording process, paying attention to every detail, not just choosing material and selecting engineers and sidemen but also becoming imbedded in the latest mastering and mixing techniques. He would have probably been the first to complain of lousy pressing quality, carrying his obsession with getting his music heard not just widely but accurately to its final stage.

*I stand up next to a mountain
Chop it down with the edge of my hand
Well, I pick up all the pieces and make an island
Might even raise a little sand*

— "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)"

Shy as he was, Jimi Hendrix rarely shouted loudly about his intents, his visions, his own conception of himself. But what David Henderson suggests and details from his songs (and what Monika Dannemann's as-yet-unpublished manuscript proves) is that Hendrix's vision was clear, his cosmology specific, and that his music operated according to plan, delivering a message which he meant to be universal. His death fragmented that intention, showed some of the limitations of the mere mortal behind the vision, but if his life is to make sense, we have to come as close as we can to taking Hendrix at face value.

This isn't simple, because Jimi was never his own best advocate. As he told *Life* magazine in 1969, "Pretend your mind is a big muddy bowl and the silt is very slowly settling down — but remember your mind's still muddy and you can't possibly grasp all I'm saying ... The everyday mud world we're living in today compared to the spiritual world is like a parasite compared to the ocean and the ocean is the biggest living thing you know about."

If this seems as obtuse as the exposition of any Oriental guru, it stands as one of Hendrix's most lucid comments on his own work. Verbally, he was usually elliptical to the point of incoherence, whether deliberately (as a black man in a white world, and playing roles previously reserved for whites, at that) or not. But Hendrix was anything but naive, although he was possessed of a tremendous innocence, and he certainly wasn't dumb, though what he was able to see and feel may have exceeded his ability to coherently articulate it. Still, even his most drug-addled interviews (almost every important sentence he ever spoke is in Henderson's massive book) repay scrutiny.

Voodoo Child of the Aquarian Age is not idle imagery — no more than Hendrix's own toying with "First Ray of the New Rising Sun," "Sky Church" and the like were simple psychedelic play. Hendrix was not an unconscious spiritual channel, although it may be that the biggest reason his enormous spiritual energy was waylaid and perverted was that he



MONIKA DANNEMANN

"A musician, if he's a messenger, is like a child who hasn't been handled too many times by man, hasn't had too many fingerprints across his brain. That's why music is so much heavier than anything you ever felt."

Jimi Hendrix, Life Magazine 1969

lacked a more adept master or deeply rooted tradition around which to organize his insights.

God knows, he was full enough of contradictions. He is most often seen as an apostle of peace, love and good vibrations these days, but he was also capable of much violence (onstage and off), and his relationships with women were especially brutal, casual and omnivorous in unappetizing ways. His own attempts to synthesize an answer to the issue of violence in his music and stage act were, though, not entirely unperceptive: "It's best to have violence on stage and watch it through TV than do it yourself," he told the same British interviewer who called him an "animal". "So what we do, we get up there and like, I found it worked both ways; we'd do our thing, you know, and so many people would dig it, would really be turned on by it, and they don't bother their old ladies as much when they get home. They don't beat their old ladies up as much (laughs) because there's hardly anything left in them. We try to drain all the violence out of their system. That's why you watch wrestling matches and football games, you get it all out of your system, unless you want to do it for real yourself and then you'd be a violent person. Bad. Bad."

That sounds pretty garbled and self-serving, but it also sounds a hell of a lot like the peace-eye Vietnam vets, who returned stoned and grooving, but over in the jungle, digging on the former paratrooper guitarist who became a hero in the trenches and huts, might be performing the most awesome atrocities. Jimi was as close as the Sixties came to having a war hero rock and roller, that's sure, and just why the grunts could identify with him. Truth to tell, what he said makes more sense than the idiots who think that all pop culture that contains violence isn't cathartic. As he told the same interviewer, "If I

wasn't a guitar player ... I'd probably be in jail, 'cos like I get very stubborn, like with the police. I used to get into arguments with them millions of time, they used to tell me to be quiet and I just CAN'T be quiet, there's no reason to be, especially if I have something to say."

Dannemann's manuscript (a memoir of their relationship and the information Jimi shared with her up to his death, next to her in bed) makes it clear that Hendrix had a highly developed and very specialized understanding of the relationship between post-nuclear technology and ancient spiritual forces such as voodoo and obeah, which operate simultaneously for him as they do in the novels of Ishmael Reed (and also, curiously enough, in Michael Thelwell's marvelous new interpretation of *The Harder They Come*.) This has something to do with his seemingly instinctive use of feedback and the actual guts of an electric guitar, the way he could play the neck and the tremolo bar and the inner electronics of the things. But it also has a great deal to do with the space ships, dragon-flies, mojos and other angels and demons that populate his songs. (Hendrix's most under-rated quality was his sheer brilliance as a poet.) In this context, LSD and Marshall amps collaborate with the most arcane spiritual energies, not cancelling one another out, but actually *enhancing* their power.

While the details of Jimi's cosmology are best left to Dannemann, it can be said that they have to do with a complex understanding of the interplay between astrology, color, music and sexuality — expressed very boldly in "Axis: Bold As Love". Death and women were heavily interconnected in all his music, both as symbols and realities, which perhaps explains the role the two women apparently closest to him — Devon Wilson and Monika Dannemann herself — played in his final hours.

For Hendrix, the goal of his performances was both racial and musical unity (which is the real flaw with Alan Douglas's approach to his music, which stresses his technical achievements to the detriment of the feelings expressed). Hendrix saw himself as a symbolic figure who contained in his bloodstream elements of all races — although as Henderson quite properly emphasizes, Afro-American was dominant, to the extent that African percussionist Kwasi Dzidoornu (Rocki) told Jimi that Hendrix used many of the same rhythms that his father, a Ghanaian drummer and voodoo priest, used in his ceremonies. Even the way Jimi danced was reminiscent.

Still, Hendrix's deepest desire was to cut across all such boundaries, as expressed in the symbolic paintings whose details he dictated to Dannemann, and which she has created with a beautiful post-psychadelic realism. Judging from what we know, Jimi Hendrix did not have just a typical acidhead's scattershot concept of multi-media presentations and polyglot culture forms, but a very specific direction in which he wished to proceed (and was proceeding). Hard as this may be to filter through intellectual processing, the goal was unity in the metaphysical sense, and it was anything but an idle or addled whim. It cuts through all his records and statements with consistent logic.

Chances are that Hendrix's ideas remained fairly inchoate to most who heard him, and were so easily perverted that it could fairly be said that he died of their neglect, because he lacked any organizing process for all the material that infested his brain. While he might be tapped into the very Jungian archetype of voodoo drumming, for instance, and furthermore, believe strongly enough in "roots" to be driven from home by one, other elements of his environment suggested that voodoo alone was insufficient as a matrix through which to operate. Just so, a firm belief in extra-terrestrial behavior may have been confirmed by the fact that mere Earthlings had just landed a man on the moon, but Hendrix was not sufficiently wealthy to get out there himself, at least not in the flesh.

The way Hendrix saw such forces playing off against one another may never make conventional "sense," and judging from the helter-skelter way his thinking jumps around in interviews (though never in songs, where it always remained



focussed), maybe they never did to him, either. But it's clear he wasn't just making this stuff up as he went along, anymore than a Rastafarian is merely blowing smoke rings when he begins "reasoning," however farfetched the results may sound to Yankee ears.

The one place where Jimi Hendrix was firmly grounded was in his music. However exploratory and haphazard some of his playing may seem, it is never insecure. Rather, it is constantly stamped with assurance (taken by some as arrogance). To me, this smacks of something more than a man going with the flow of visionary insight. Instead, Hendrix was acting out his role as a contemporary bluesman, in the great mold of Robert Johnson, Charley Patton, Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters, with that selfsame hellhound dogging his steps.

It's hard to think of any important popular musician of the Twentieth Century, from Duke Ellington and Elvis Presley to Jimmie Rodgers and John Coltrane, who wasn't steeped in the blues. But more than most, Hendrix harked back specifically to the country bluesman, in his diction and phrasing, in his lyrics (look at the final line of the verse quoted here from "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" which is not an isolated example) and most of all in his eccentric and elastic sense of time, which pays so little attention to anything but itself that it can hardly be the product of anything *but* the absorption of solo voice and guitar. (Is Hendrix's time that much different than, say, Charley Patton or Robert Pete Williams?)

The clearest expression of what Jimi Hendrix meant to say is almost unquestionably the album *Electric Ladyland*, which is the recording over which he had the most control, and over which he labored longest. And the center of *Electric Ladyland* is the grand blues, "Voodoo Chile," nothing less than a creation myth meant to encompass the entire universe his inner heart desired the world to see.

In spirit, it is the blues that motivates almost all of the greatest Hendrix music, from "Purple Haze" to "Spanish Castle Magic," the immortal "Red House," the majestic "All Along the Watchtower" and the futuristic funk of "Machine Gun." Blues not just as an ache in the heart, the way the amateurs

"There's no telling how many lives your spirit will go through—die and be reborn. Like my mind will be back in the days when I was a flying horse. Before I can remember anything, I can remember music and stars and planets. I could go to sleep and write fifteen symphonies. I had very strange feelings that I was here for something and I was going to get a chance to be heard. I got the guitar together 'cause that was all I had. I used to be really lonely."

Jimi Hendrix

understand it, but as a soaring leap for joy, an affirmation of life itself. It is that very spirit that assures that even if Jimi Hendrix had worked in total obscurity, or if the rest of his music is buried for the next century, anyone who hears it must respond with awe. As surely as any artist in history, every time Hendrix's plays he holds us in his thrall, forever. Our exploration of his legacy, in that sense, has hardly begun, whether or not more crucial material ever appears. What we have already is inexhaustibly rich.



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